

VZCZCXYZ0024
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGB #0079/01 0121427
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
R 121427Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6094
INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T BAGHDAD 000079

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/12/2020
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [KISL](#) [KTFN](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: NAJAF GOVERNOR ON PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT AND
DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SADRIST TREND

Classified By: OPA Director Greta Holtz for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The PRT, including the Team Leader, Public Diplomacy Officer, the Chief Engineer, and one of our Linguists, met with Gov. Adnan Al-Zurfi January 5 to discuss a range of topics including a post-election Shia alliance, security, the Najaf International Airport, and the elections. Zurfi reports that he is negotiating with local Sadrist Trend representatives to encourage them to disengage from militia activities. END SUMMARY.

RECONSTRUCTING THE SHI'A ALLIANCE

¶2. (C) In discussing Prime Minister Maliki's January 4 visit to Najaf, Zurfi said it was "mostly politics". Governor Adnan Al-Zurfi briefly talked about the possibility of a post-election Shia alliance. Zurfi told PRTOffs that Maliki and he met with Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani to discuss the Shia prospects for a post election Shi'a alliance. (COMMENT: We suspect that the PM gave Sistani his views on the political landscape. However, as always, after people visit Sistani, we only know what they put out in the media. Sistani is usually very judicious or non-committal in his comments. END COMMENT.) Zurfi would not engage in further discussion of the Sistani-Maliki meeting.

"IF YOU ATTACK AMERICANS, WE WILL FIGHT YOU"

¶3. (S) As the conversation shifted to security, Zurfi explained that throughout his administration he has primarily focused on ensuring stability in the province. Following the two improvised explosive device (IED) attacks near Forward Operating Base (FOB) Endeavor, home to PRT Najaf, on November 9 and 10, Zurfi said he sent a message to the Iranians. (NOTE: Post believes this may have been the Iranian Consul in Najaf, but could not confirm. END NOTE). The governor allegedly told them that "attacks on American forces or officials in Najaf would not be tolerated and that an attack on the Americans is an attack against Najaf and we will fight you."

¶4. (S) Zurfi told PRTOffs he subsequently met with Sadrist Trend representatives and militia group members on January 4 to inform them he would not tolerate aggressive actions against Americans in Najaf. (NOTE: The governor did not distinguish between the Sadrist Trend party and its extremist components in his discussion with PRTOffs. END NOTE.) The governor said he urged them to focus on political issues, and renounce militia activities against the occupation "because there is no occupation" under the terms of the bilateral Security Agreement. Zurfi explained that U.S. development funds and technical assistance in the province demonstrated their commitment to Najaf, and told them the U.S. could maintain a lower profile in their movements if they judged the area to be safer.

15. (S) Zurfi claimed the Sadrists had come to him repeatedly to request that he release those arrested in the IED attacks and the man who had fired near the U.S. convoy outside the Chamber of Commerce in December. They stated those attacks were not against Iraqis, but against the Americans. Zurfi told them releasing the suspects was out of the question until the Sadrist militias agreed to stop the attacks. At that point, he would see. (NOTE: Zurfi was unwilling to speculate whether this agreement would be announced publicly if concluded. END NOTE)

CLEARING THE AIR ON THE AIRPORT

16. (C) Zurfi accused ISCI of trying to destroy the good work the Dawa Party has done to develop the Najaf International Airport. Zurfi believed ISCI had spread the recent rumors of the Deputy Governor with his supporters going to the airport and taking money, allegations the governor claimed were untrue. He said that money was not even stored at the airport, but was moved each night to a bank.

17. (C) Zurfi informed PRTOffs that Al-Aqeeq's management role had been terminated and the company would no longer run the operations of the airport, due to financial improprieties and their refusal to pay any of the contract companies that support airport operations. The province had kept the main three employees of Al-Aqeeq in place to continue to manage the airport, including the operation manager, finance manager and the legal advisor. The governor noted that Al Aqeeq was still in place as an investor, but believed they would be gradually eased out. Zurfi also mentioned that Sabre will remain the security contractor and said the province would

begin paying Sabre directly.

FAIR ELECTIONS IN NAJAF

18. (C) The Governor assured PRTOffs throughout the meeting that all political parties would have equal opportunities for their campaigns, specifically mentioning that the election security (Iraqi Police or Iraqi Army) would not be used to support any political party, including his own. Zurfi made it clear to all party representatives that two things during this election cycle: no security disruptions, and prosecutions of anyone from any party who attempted to purchase votes.

HILL